

October 3, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Honorable Secretary Nielsen,

We are writing to express concern about the recently announced possible changes to the “public charge” rule, as proposed changes would have significant implications for the counties that we represent.

One in four Texas children has at least one parent who is not a U.S. citizen. If this rule were changed as proposed, it would raise fears in the families of as many as 1.8 million Texas children. Under the proposed rule, immigration officials could deny lawful permanent residency to immigrants if they have low incomes and a history of using certain public benefits, including health care (Medicaid, and Medicare’s “Extra Help” subsidies for prescription medications); food (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program SNAP, formerly “food stamps”); and housing (Section 8 vouchers/subsidies).

The circulation of the earlier rule versions in 2018 caused fear among Texas families that include immigrants, causing untold numbers to drop or refuse Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP for US citizen children and family members of immigrants seeking authorized immigration. Texas county governments and local taxpayers are left to fill the gaps in basic needs. This confusion and fear may take years to reverse, and will result in reduced immunization rates; prenatal care; adequate nutrition for pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children; and delayed access to medical care for children and services for children with developmental delays.

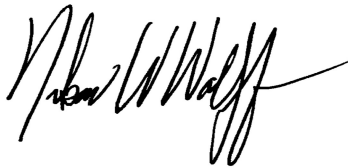
Now, the newly proposed changes would further discourage and scare people away from federal programs, and will further shift the burden onto local taxpayers. This fear will be severely aggravated by the anticipated US Department of Justice rule to increase scrutiny of Green Card holders who suffer illness, injury, or economic hardships after being granted permanent resident status. Any policy change that makes it harder for people to get access to the benefits to which they are legally entitled risks increasing the prevalence of communicable and chronic disease and could negatively impact the health of our most vulnerable, including pregnant women and infants.

The new proposal also would dramatically reduce the ability of low-income working parents to pursue lawful immigration pathways to get a Green Card, changing family-based immigration to an income-based system that restricts immigration by low-wage workers, and would discriminate against larger families, as well as people with pre-existing health conditions or disabilities. Our Texas economy depends and thrives on the contributions of immigrant families, and we cannot afford to lose a generation of hard-working residents whose children go on to achieve great things for our state.

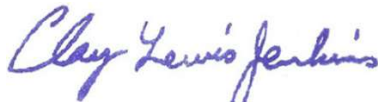
While we disagree with any changes to the “public charge” rule, as it would have an overall negative impact on our local constituents, we are particularly against having Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) as one of the factors included in these changes.

For the sake of our constituents in Texas, we hope that you will reconsider moving forward with the announced changes. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nelson W. Wolff', with a stylized, flowing script.

Nelson W. Wolff
Bexar County Judge

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Clay Lewis Jenkins', with a cursive style.

Clay Lewis Jenkins
Dallas County Judge

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RJV', with a very stylized, almost abstract script.

Ruben John Vogt
El Paso County Judge

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SEK', with a cursive style.

Sarah Eckhardt
Travis County Judge